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BIOGRAPHY AND BIBLIOGRAPHY

OF

GEORGE M. KOBER, M. D., LL. D.

DEAN OF THE

GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY SCHOOL OF MEDICINE

COMPILED AND ARRANGED

ON

THE OCCASION OF HIS SEVENTIETH BIRTHDAY

MARCH 28, 1920

FRANCIS A. TONDORF, S. J., Ph. D.

WASHINGTON, D. C.
1920

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Geo. M. Kober

Born March 28th 1850.

M. D., March 7th 1873, Georgetown University
LL. D., June 14th 1906, Georgetown University

BIOGRAPHY

OF

GEORGE MARTIN KOBER, M. D., LL D.

DEAN AND PROFESSOR OF HYGIENE, SCHOOL OF MEDICINE
GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY, WASHINGTON, D. C.

FRANCIS A. TONDORF, S. J.,

Head of the Department of Physiology, Georgetown Medical School.

S MUCH knowledge does not constitute wisdom nor a facile memory a philosopher, so mastery of the medical science does not of itself make a great physician. If he be without a heart, the sufferings and countless ills that human flesh is heir to, become to the practitioner so many modes or accidents of being clinical phenomena, to be tabulated, observed, treated and cured, it may be, but there his philosophy of utility exhausts itself.

When, on the other hand, to skill and learning is joined the sweet and generous temper of the friend and comforter who knows the precious art of penetrating beneath the sore to the seared soul, then has medicine achieved the pattern set by the first Great Physician of Humanity.

It was not by chance that the Anglo-Saxons called the Saviour of the world "Haelend," the healer. The true dignity of knowledge lies in its dedication to the common good. To indicate that the seventy years of the life of Dean Kober measure up faithfully to this standard has made the task of itemizing the following facts one of sincerest love.

Dr. George Martin Kober was born to Jacob and Dorothea (Behr) Kober at Alsfeld, Hessen-Darmstadt, Germany, on March 28, 1850. He received his earlier education at the public and grand-ducal "Real-schule" of his native town. His father, a revolutionist, had vowed that none of his sons should serve under a German king, prince, or potentate. Accordingly he early prevailed upon George to emigrate to the United States, which he did in April, 1867. Upon his arrival, he found that his brother Charles, who had preceded him to the States,

had secured for him an assignment to the hospital corps at the Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. Under the tutelage of Surgeon Joseph J. B. Wright, U. S. A., Kober began here what might be fittingly styled his pre-medical course. His application in January, 1870, for an appointment as hospital steward was acted favorably on and accordingly we find him reporting for duty on January 10, at the Frankford Arsenal, near Philadelphia. Here he read medicine privately under Dr. Robert Bruce Burns, a graduate of the University of Edinburgh. Ordered to Washington, to the office of the Surgeon-General, in September, 1871, he found it possible to formally enter upon his medical studies in the Medical School of Georgetown University. With the schedule calling for no exercises before 5 P. M., Kober was able to attend all the classes and, not satisfied with this, he tutored privately under Drs. Johnson Eliot and Robert Reyburn. After two winter and summer courses he was graduated in March, 1873. The following winter he figured as the first graduate of a post-graduate course, inaugurated by Drs. Thompson, Busey, Ashford, and others, at the Columbia Hospital, Washington, D. C. During the period of his medical studies, Kober considered himself fortunate in being assigned the duty of indexing all the official communications on file in the Surgeon-General's office from 1812 to the date of his departure in 1874. In these dusty records he found many items of extreme scientific, historical, and epidemiological interest; so the reports of Surgeon William Beaumont, stationed at Fort Mackinac, Michigan, on his "Observations and Experiments in 1825 in the case of Alexis St. Martin," who had been treated for a gun-shot wound of the abdomen resulting in a gastric fistula; so too the report of a perforating gun-shot wound of the chest with recovery in the case of Gen. James Shields, of Mexican War fame. Of equal interest were the reports on yellow fever and cholera up to the year 1874. Kober learned here to respect the old Army doctors, for when referring to them afterwards, in his lectures, he ever insisted that "they knew how to use the English language better than men of modern times." Whilst engaged in this indexing, Kober had gained the confidence and good will of Surgeon-General Barnes and Assistant Surgeon-General Crane, of Drs. Joseph J. Woodward and George A. Otis, editors of the *Medical and Surgical History of the Civil War,* and Dr. John S. Billings, in charge of the library, and who, with the assistance of but one hospital steward, was laying the foundation of the Index Catalogue. Billings found Kober of service in supplying correct titles for the articles published in the German medical periodicals. His fellow clerks fittingly christened him "Index" because of his unselfish devotion to this trying work, and lest the harvester, Time, should rob him of this new birth-right, his close friend, George Dowe, on the occasion of Kober's twenty-fourth birthday, did this title into the following verse:

Index you are rightly named,
Let thy future name be famed.
I do not come in grim scholastic mood
To fulminate some dreary platitude.
But only wish, my loved and honored friend,
That hope and peace be your till life shall end.
Hope, the sheet anchor of the youthful soul,
And peace when angry waves of trouble roll.
And, while you practice well the healing art,
Let strength be given to act the manly part;
Good common sense to know the good from ill,
And test the powers of plasters, draught or pill.
And if, upon some distant honored day,
The men and women you have cured for pay
Shall add their record to your fair renown,
By writing some good testimonial down,
Be this the message one and all shall send:
That every patient was your fervent friend.
Search carefully true wisdom's bounteous stores,
That all her waiting treasure may be yours.
May she attend, when years run trembling down,
With honors wreath your whitening hairs to crown.

Appointed acting assistant surgeon, U. S. A., he became post surgeon in July, 1874, at Alcatraz Island, California, which position he filled till November of the same year, at which time he was ordered to Fort McDermit, Nevada, in the same capacity. In the fall of 1875 he served with the First U. S. Cavalry in the southeastern Nevada expedition against hostile Indians and in 1877 took active part in the Nez-Perces war. From July to October of this year the field hospital at Kamiah, on the Clearwater, Idaho, was under his charge.

In November, 1877, he met for the first time Dr. George M. Sternberg, then post surgeon at Walla Walla, and this acquaintance ripened into a life-long friendship. Dr. Kober never tired of acknowledging his indebtedness to the General for the many inspirations he had received from him. Having served as post surgeon successively at a camp near Spokane, W. T.; at Fort Coeur d' Alene, Idaho; Fort Klamath, Oregon; and Fort Bidwell, California, he was relieved from this service on the reception of the following orders, highly commendatory of his efficiency:

Post Orders)
No. 104)

Fort Bidwell, California.
Nov. 11th, 1886.

* * * In recognition of the long and faithful professional services rendered to the government during the past twelve years in the field, in pursuit of hostile Indians, and at various posts, the commanding officer cannot part with him

without some expression of his feelings of regret, as part of this service was rendered under his immediate command.

His devotion to his professional duties has been warmly recognized not only by his commanding officer, but by others, and has stamped him as one of the most skilful surgeons in the U. S. Army.

A steadfast friend, a faithful officer, with the many acts of kindness to all, professional and otherwise, he has endeared himself not only to the officers and enlisted men of the garrison, but to the community at large, which he has helped to build up. * * * He carries with him our best wishes for his future welfare and happiness.

By order of Major Gordon.
(Signed). L. M. Brett, 2nd Lieut., 2nd Cavalry.
Post Adjutant.

After severing his connections with the army, Kober remained at this station caring for his many patients until June, 1887, at which time he traveled extensively in America and Europe. He returned to Fort Bidwell the following year. In the fall of 1889, we find him in Washington devoting his time to college, hospital, and literary work. Besides acting as professor of Hygiene and State Medicine in the Georgetown Medical School, he assisted his friend and former classmate, Dr. Carrol E. Morgan, in his specialties, diseases of the throat, chest, etc. In the winter of 1889-90, he directed the attention of the District authorities to the sewage pollution of the Potomac water, indicating this as an important factor in the alarming prevalence of typhoid fever in Washington. In August, 1890, he went to Berlin as a member of the Tenth International Medical Congress and there read a paper entitled, "Etiology of typhoid fever with special reference to water-borne epidemics." His California investments necessitated his return to Fort Bidwell in December, 1890. He resumed his medical practice there and for a year or more was again attending surgeon of the post.

His *alma mater* welcomed him back to the lecture room in the fall of 1893. From this date on, health problems of the District, its social and industrial betterment were his one concern. At the request of the Health Officer, in 1895, he investigated the possible causes of typhoid fever in the city and in his report suggested the agency of flies as a transmitter of the disease. His public addresses on various occasions and researches into the relative merits of the various processes of water filtration, very materially influenced Congress towards appropriating the necessary funds for the installation of the model filtration plant at Brookland, District of Columbia. During the years 1895-96, Kober was a volunteer worker in the Hygienic Laboratory of the Public Health Service of the United States. As a member of the board of directors of the Associated Charities the housing problem for the least resourceful people in the national capital appealed to him with special emphasis and accordingly he is recognized as one of the principal promoters of the Washington Sanitary Housing Companies organized in 1897 and 1904. Through these agencies sanitary houses, at reasonable rentals, have been provided for over eight hundred wage-

earners and their dependents. The success of this earlier enterprise has lent encouragement to a system on a wider basis not only in the national capital but other larger cities of the States and merited for Kober a gold medal of award at the Paris International Exposition of 1900. Acting as secretary of two housing companies from the day of their organization until November, 1915, upon the death of General George M. Sternberg, he succeeded to the office of president. In 1897, he was elected an honorary member of the Association of Military Surgeons of the United States, undoubtedly in recognition of his services as civilian physician in the United States Army as likewise because of his able communication "The Place of Military Medicine and Surgery in the Medical College Curriculum." When reviewed in the light of the recent World War this paper and a kindred one entitled: "Higher Medical Education and a Plea for Better Training of the Volunteer Medical Officer," published in 1898, have special significance. As a medical educator, Dr. Kober strenuously espoused every method of scientific research. Thoroughly convinced that animal experimentation must yield most marvelous results, we find him, as chairman of the Committee of Public Health of the Civic Center on February 15, 1900, filing a most vigorous protest against the enactment of Senate Bill, No. 34, whose purport was to restrict the use of animals for experimental purposes in medicine. The brief he submitted on this occasion embodies facts and arguments which convinced even the sponsor of the bill, Senator J. H. Gallinger, that the proposed legislation was superfluous. It may be pertinent to mention here that Kober very effectually recalled this incident before the Judiciary Committee Hearing in November, 1919, when a similar bill by the anti-vivisectionists was under discussion. In 1901, Kober was selected to deliver before the American Medical Association, at St. Paul, Minnesota, the "Oration on State Medicine." His theme was: "The Progress and Tendency of Hygiene and Sanitary Science in the Nineteenth Century." This same year he was invseted as dean of the medical school of his *alma mater*. His plans for a curriculum calculated to insure for medical aspirants a more complete and harmonious education was set forth in his "Plea for a Standard Medical Curriculum," read before the Association of American Medical Colleges, in 1904. At this meeting he was appointed chairman of a "Committee on National Uniformity of Curriculum." The report submitted by the committee was approved and it is a pleasing reflection to recall that Dr. William J. Means, in his presidential address, March 4, 1919, referred to it in most appreciative terms. June 14, 1906, Kober was the recipient of the honorary degree of Doctor of Law from his *alma mater*. The citation follows:

"It is fitting that universities should show their appreciation of their sons who have done distinguished service in the cause of science and humanity. There are none more worthy than they who lessen human

misery and by their genius and devotion ward off disease and suffering amongst men. They are the truep hilanthropists, inspired with genuine unselfish love for their fellows. Such is the man whom the university gladly and gratefully honors today; a man who besides his duties to the public, acknowledged and rewarded already by distant nations, has labored in season and out of season for the welfare of the medical school of this university and of each individual student until his work has been recognized by the official medical body of the United States in electing him President of the Association of American Schols of Medicine, and in its public declaration that the course of study introduced by him into Georgetown Medical School should be the standard of all medical schools."

President Theodore Roosevelt in 1906, designated Kober as a member of the Board of Charities and in May of the following year as a member of the President Homes Commission. As chairman of the Committee on Social Betterment he drew up monographs on "Industrial Hygiene" and "Social Betterment," which were published as Senate document No. 644 in 1908. At the meeting of the first Conference on the Conservation of National Resources, which convened at the White House May 13, 1908, on invitation of the President of the United States, he addressed that body on "The Conservation of Life and Health by Improved Water Supply." Dr. Kober has been a member of the National Tuberculosis Association since its organization in 1905. He is also a member of the local Society for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis. His plans were adopted in the construction of the Tuberculosis Hospital in Washington, formally opened to patients June 28, 1908, and were awarded a medal at the exposition connected with the International Congress on Tuberculosis held in Washington in the fall of 1908. He may be very fittingly designated a pioneer worker in the crusade against tuberculosis, having read as early as 1889 a paper entitled: "Etiology and Prevention of Tuberculosis in the Light of Modern Research," before the Medical Society of the District of Columbia. This lecture was published by the State Board of Health of California as a special pamphlet in 1890 and was followed by a second in 1893, "A Plea for the Prevention of Tuberculosis," which had been previously read before the State Sanitary Convention of California.

Dr. Kober is a Fellow of the American Medical Association, of the American Association for the Advancement of Science, likewise a member of the Advisory Council of that same body. Member of the Cosmos Club. Member of the Association of American Physicians (Secretary from 1909 to 1916, at which time he retired and was elected honorary member). Member of the American Public Health Association (Vice-President, 1916). Association of American Medical Colleges (President in 1906). The National Association for the Study and Prevention of Tuberculosis (President in 1915). National Housing

Association. Medical and Surgical Society District of Columbia (President 1889, 1917-19). The Medical Association of the District of Columbia (President 1898). Medical Society District of Columbia (President 1903). The Washington Anthropological Society (President 1907-1918-1920). The Social Hygiene Society of the District of Columbia (President 1918-1919). Chairman of the Committee on Lectures, Sixth International Congress on Tuberculosis, Washington, D. C., September 28th to October 5th, 1908. Honorary Member of the Medical and Surgical Society of Washington, D. C., 1910. President of Section IV, Industrial and Occupational Hygiene of the 15th dent 1907-1918-1919). The Social Hygienic Society of the District of International Congress on Hygiene and Demography in Washington, September 23-28, 1912. Chairman of Sub-Section C, Sociological Medicine of the Pan-American Scientific Congress, held in Washington, D. C., December 27, 1915 to January 8, 1916. Member of the Washington Academy of Sciences (Vice-President 1919-1920.)

In 1912, Dr. Kober was appointed by the President of the American Medical Association, Chairman of a Committee on Red Cross Medical Work. This Commitee was created so as to provide a body of representative physicians of approved qualification to direct or participate in medical work, carried on by the Red Cross in different localities in times of war or emergencies and to advise with representatives of that society in handling medical and sanitary problems incident to such an occurrence. The Committee up to May, 1916, organized committees in 588 county medical societies located in 47 states. During the recent world war he was a member of the committee on "Conservation and Welfare of Workers" and chairman of the Committee of Rural Workmen's Areas with Special Reference to Housing; Member of the Council of Defense, District of Columbia; Chairman of the Committee on housing.

Dr. Kober is the author of 110 monographs, chapters in text books, journal articles and reviews on medical, surgical, sanitary and sociological subjects, and over 120 published discussions. His first medical essay was on "Infantile Paralysis" published in the *Pacific Medical Journal* in November, 1874, in which he preented all the available evidence that the disease was due to some organic lesion of the medulla spinalis. In the same year he published his Urinology and its practical application. In 1875, he published notes in the *American Weekly*, Vol. III, p. 241-243, on chronic dysentery treated with injections of a solution of chlorate of potash, and adenitis (tubercular) treated with injections of carbolic acid and glycerine. In October, 1876, he reported in the *American Journal Medical Sciences,* a case of gun-shot wound of the knee joint, in which he used probably for the first time an injection of tincture of iodine and carbolic acid. Dr. Edmond Souchon, of New Orleans, in his monograph on "Original Contributions of America to Medical Sciences" credits Dr. Kober as having been the

first to publish notes on the three subjects referred to. He also credits him with having been the first to point out that insects, especially flies are doubtless frequently the cause of spreading typhoid fever. Dr. Kober's tabulation of 330 milk-borne epidemics and his monograph on "Milk in Relation to Public Health" and his first book on "Industrial Hygiene," published as Senate documents, and his chapter dealing with the effects of diminished atmosphere upon the health of aviators published in 1916, are regarded as pioneer contributions to American medical literature.

Such is the story of a lifetime of sound scholarship and scientific achievements which have made him an ornament to the medical profession and a consolation to his *alma mater*. No form of human misery has been so low as not to be the object of his solicitude, no need of the University has been so insignificant as not to command complete response. He has done good in the open, he has done good by stealth, but, withal, as one devoid of the spoiling taint of vanity or self-seeking. Of a personal integrity unimpeached and unimpeachable, of unswerving fidelity in adherence to high ideals of medical education, his is the singular privilege to note his name chiseled high on the pllar of the temple of fame.

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Dean and Professor of Hygiene, School of Medicine,

Georgetown University, Washington, D. C.

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